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SUBJECT: SETTING THE SCENE FOR COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND'S 1 NOVEMBER VISIT TO TAJIKISTAN

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Jacobson, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy Dushanbe, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (d)

¶1. (C) Executive Summary. Embassy Dushanbe looks forward to your upcoming visit to Tajikistan. Besides the opening of the bridge between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in August, little has changed since your introductory meeting with President Rahmon in June. As this is your second visit, you will have an opportunity to further develop personal relations with President Rahmon as well as conduct initial meetings with Minister of Defense Khairolloyev and the Chairman of the State Committee for National Security Abdurahimov.

¶2. (C) Your second visit falls almost a full year after the presidential election, which secured President Rahmon a third seven-year term. In addition to Department of Defense and CENTCOM military and security-related programs which are progressing well, we view economic and democratic development as integral components to ensuring long-term regional stability. Despite campaign promises and expected changes, Tajikistan remains stalled on the road of reform, and in many areas is losing ground. Throughout 2006, Rahmon assured international visitors and his public alike that "after the election," new blood and new ideas would take Tajikistan to a new era of economic prosperity and open civil society. The Tajik leader continues to sidestep the promises of the November 2006 election, and the government is less worried about international perceptions and more confident in tightening its control over society and the economy. President Rahmon's ministers and advisors continue to argue for the need for stability before democracy, and economics before politics.

¶3. (C) Despite these trends, Tajikistan remains an extremely important country worthy of your time and investment as CENTCOM Commander. Tajikistan has significant potential to achieve more prosperity and stability, which if seized, will provide additional economic and strategic options. However, Tajikistan also faces significant transnational threats that could affect regional and international stability. Although religious extremism is currently not a major threat in Tajikistan, youth are gradually becoming more disaffected with the government's increasing attempts to control religious practice. As you and President Rahmon discussed during your June visit, the future of Afghanistan is of primary significance to both Tajikistan and

the United States.

¶4. (C) The key theme that you can emphasize, both in your bilateral meetings and in the press opportunity, is that Tajikistan's long-term security and economic prosperity are closely linked to its progress in advancing democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. This message is counter-intuitive to President Rahmon and many of his advisors, and certainly to Minister of Defense Khairoloyev and the Chairman of State Security Abdurahimov, with whom you will meet.

Strong and consistent messages from high-ranking U.S. interlocutors will play an important role in slowing (or reversing) Tajikistan's slipping toward increasing authoritarianism and corruption.

Background - Reform

¶5. (C) Negative trends. Instead of steering his country towards much needed reform and growth, we see a number of worrying tendencies in Rahmon's leadership and government. Tighter government control, a smaller, less competent inner circle, little political will to go beyond rhetoric and increasing signs of public restiveness are a few of the negative trends we see. Increased unconditional economic assistance from China and Iran undermine the importance of creating a business climate that attracts private investors, and the pernicious little-brother-big-brother relationship with Russia works against the U.S. (and European) programs on rule of law and good governance. Likewise the government's legislation of cultural issues - the ban on wearing the hijab, the closing and demolishing of unregistered mosques, and the ban on women praying in mosques - are seen by some as an anti-Islamic campaign. Failure to correct these tendencies will risk

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Tajikistan becoming a less stable, less prosperous country mired in poverty, unemployment and clan politics.

¶6. (C) Political reform. The Tajik government is still not sold on the benefits of democratic reform or political openness. It looks at Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and its own civil war, and questions what good could come out of allowing more political expression and the development of political parties. They may not like Uzbekistan, but the Tajiks admire the "stability" Karimov's regime has wrought and count on the international community to give Tajikistan leeway as long as it remains better than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan -- the bad examples in the region. We must convince the Tajik government that creating democratic institutions and practices -- such as a reformed judiciary that promotes rule of law, a parliament that is educated and engaged in legislating, rather than serving as a rubber stamp, and a freer media to inform its citizenry -- are steps that will actually be in the government's interest, and not threaten President Rahmon's authority.

¶7. (C) Economic reform. Economic reform is more palatable, and the government has taken a few small steps over the last year towards improving the investment climate, such as a law on inspections that could cut the number of inspections a business faces in half, a Committee on Investments and State Property and an Agency to Fight Corruption and Economic Crimes ostensibly aimed at rooting out corruption on all levels. How these new initiatives are implemented will demonstrate how serious Tajikistan is about linking itself to the global economy. Thus far, progress is slim.

¶8. (C) Freedom of religious expression. Of concern are the draft Law on Religious Organizations and the rising tension between religious leaders and the government. According to unconfirmed internet news reports, the Tajik government has closed 213 mosques in Dushanbe alone over the last two months; there are also reports that the government has demolished four of these mosques. The government argued that these mosques were not properly registered, and did not have official government

permission to function. Another recent example of unwarranted regulation was a recent initiative to test the religious knowledge of the imams at mosques in Dushanbe resulting in the dismissal of four imams. A new draft law on religion contains a provision which could ban political parties with a religious affiliation, such as the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan -- Central Asia's only legally sanctioned Islamic party. The net effect of these attempts has been referred by one of our contacts as "secular extremism." The Government's control of religious life is -- and will be -- superficial at best, and current policies are fostering discontent. In the near term, vocal or violent opposition is unlikely. However, severe restrictions on religious practice will continue to allow broader discontent to simmer.

¶9. (C) The Tajik response. Government officials will likely try to parry any discussion of better governance and democratic reform with a request for U.S. investment in the economy and infrastructure. Given the steady flow of state-funded investment from China, Iran and Russia in hydropower, transmission lines, telecom, roads and tunnels, the Tajiks will be looking for the same kind of engagement from the United States -- and will be less interested in hearing that they should improve their business climate to attract private companies.

Economics

¶10. (C) Economics before politics. During your short visit, you will once again witness the veneer of Dushanbe's active consumer economy, which hides the underbelly of massive corruption and industrial decay. The government, including the former Tajik Ambassador to the United States and now Foreign Minister Zarifi and President Rahmon (going back to their Tajik roots), insists on talking "economics before politics." However, they turn a deaf ear when we insist that only reforming their business climate will attract Western investors, and they dismiss the suggestion that corruption scares off businesses. They point to over \$800 million in no-strings-attached Chinese loans they have received for infrastructure projects, and tell us to bring American companies to Tajikistan.

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¶11. (C) The investment climate. Although there is some enthusiasm for U.S. investment and requests to send American companies to Tajikistan, there are few substantial examples of what the Tajiks are doing to create an attractive environment or recruit international businesses beyond vague talk of "fighting corruption" and a "law on foreign investments" that has yet truly to protect the few international firms that run into problems. Cross-border trade faces customs challenges, visa issues, and political mistrust. Courts do not always uphold contracts or the rule of law. Investors bristle at the hassle of Tajik corruption; repeated demands for money from low and mid-level officials across the government dissuade entrepreneurs. Small businesses flourish outside the official economy trading agricultural and consumer goods, avoiding taxes and customs fees.

Regional Integration

¶12. (C) The Uzbek problem. Although the Tajik government shares our enthusiasm for regional integration, deep down, they may not share the same fundamental vision. Tajik officials define "region" differently, and cannot talk about regional issues without including Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan causes Tajikistan serious problems with electricity and gas, customs, imports, exports, visas, landmines, water sharing and even locusts. FM Zarifi has even unofficially told Ambassador that he will lobby NATO to have old Soviet-era weapons transferred from former Eastern-bloc countries to face the ensuing Uzbek onslaught.

¶13. (C) Energy as an export. As part of the emphasis on regional integration, the United States is pushing for Tajik hydropower to be exported to Pakistan and Afghanistan. A major issue is who will pay for the electricity once it is produced. To that end, the United States is working in Afghanistan and Tajikistan to harmonize the regulatory environment. The Asian Development Bank is currently facilitating the negotiation of a power purchasing agreement between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which could encourage U.S. private sector participation in the development of hydropower and related infrastructure.

¶14. (C) New bridge to Afghanistan. Despite public statements from President Rahmon and other Tajik officials on the importance of the bridge and related road projects following the August 26 ceremonial opening of the U.S.-built Tajik-Afghan bridge, the State Committee on National Security had effectively been vetoing bridge traffic. Recent interventions by the Embassy appear to have led to a new compromise among Tajik government agencies which will allow a limited stream of truck traffic across the bridge. In particular, they will allow trucks carrying Pakistani cement being imported for the Japanese road construction project. Post continues to communicate our intention to bring an assessment team from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection service to review bridge operations in mid November with an eye toward recommending additional assistance. We have consistently stressed the need for all Tajik government agencies -- in particular the Border Guards, who are subordinate to the State Committee on National Security, and Customs -- to work together and cooperate directly with their Afghan counterparts to establish operating procedures for the bridge. The bridge is crucial to giving the Tajiks more opportunity to bypass Uzbekistan and look to South Asia as a commercial destination and partner.

Security and Military Structures

¶15. (C) Balancing Russia and others. Rahmon has not changed his "open door" policy of working with all countries; yet Tajikistan is still primarily influenced by Russia, and this factor significantly colors its security perceptions. The presence of the 201st Russian Military Base effectively supports the existence of the Rahmon regime. Russia also maintains a relatively constant stream of black propaganda against U.S.-led initiatives and activities in Tajikistan and Central Asia. There was considerable Russian pressure on cabinet appointments during the December 2006 government reshuffle and officials continued to express their concern with Russian pressure as recently as the CIS/CSTO/EurAsEC summits during the first week of October

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¶107. The presence of Russian Border Advisors, while greatly decreased, still leaves Tajikistan with an overseer who does not necessarily always have the Tajiks' best interests in mind. Tajikistan also deftly balances China, Iran (see Dushanbe 786 and IIR 6 947 0016) and India, as well as membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). During the aforementioned early October 07 summits, the SCO and CSTO signed a cooperation document pledging joint efforts in international peacekeeping. The Russia-inspired vision is that this cooperation may lead to the evolution of the SCO/CSTO into a multi-functional security organization on par with NATO.

¶116. (C) Tajikistan's Armed Forces. The Tajik Armed Forces consist of numerous power structures which, in the absence of an over-arching security strategy, regularly scrap for roles, missions and very limited resources. President Rahmon clearly has a hierarchy of favorites within his security establishment, with the National Guard falling out on top and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) generally getting the leftovers. The Main Department for Border Forces, reorganized under the State Committee for National Security in December 2006, falls in the middle of this spectrum.

¶17. (C) Ministry of Defense. Adrift in roles and missions ranging from counter-terrorism to homeland defense and preoccupied with the proverbial Uzbek threat, the Ministry of Defense is the weak link in U.S.-Tajik military relations. As a fighting force, the Tajik Land Forces are extremely limited in capability, their Air Force virtually non-existent.

General-Colonel (U.S. 3-star equivalent) Sherali Khairoloyev has just completed his twelfth year as the Tajik Minister of Defense. Khairoloyev delivers a consistent message - Tajiks prefer receiving material goods (called "technical assistance") vice training and reform-oriented support. We try to dispel this notion as often as possible. Recently he has focused on improving his officer corps starting with the military educational system, requesting assistance for the high-school and college-level military educational institutions -- a goal we are seeking funding to support as it will enable us reach the incoming generation of younger officers. The Minister and his entrenched mindset are the main obstacles to improved military relations between the United States and Tajikistan.

¶18. (C) National Guard. The National Guard fulfills multiple roles, ranging from counter-terrorism to homeland defense, yet it is primarily designed to protect the Rahmon regime and respond to him personally. Essentially, they are President Rahmon's own Praetorian Guard and they clearly receive the priority of fill and perks within the Tajik defense establishment. The Commander, General-Major (U.S. 1-star equivalent) Rajabali Rahmoniliev is a young, comparatively progressive thinker, and hailing from the President's hometown of Danghara, can be considered one of Rahmon's staunchest allies outside of his own family. The National Guard is arguably the most competent conventional/limited special operations capable force in Tajikistan. The National Guard has successfully completed four iterations of SOCCENT JCET counter terrorism training, with a fifth JCET to begin in January 2008.

¶19. (C) Border Forces. The Main Department for Border Forces, reorganized under the State Committee for National Security in the December 2006 post-election reshuffle, is commanded by a young MOD-bred officer, General-Major (U.S. 1-star equivalent) SherAli Mirzo (recently changed from Mirzoev in the latest attempt at name de-Russification of Tajik government officials following in the footsteps of President Rahmon and Foreign Minister Zarifi). The reorganization has yielded some retrenchment in U.S.-funded border-related programs, although these are probably due more to the State Committee on National Security oversight of the Border Forces than to Mirzo's personality. Ostensibly done to consolidate and improve border control, the Tajiks probably viewed this as a "normal" return to the former Soviet model of Border Guards as a wing of the intelligence and security service, a step most post-Soviet countries have made. Given the numerous cross-border/transnational ills that plague Tajikistan's borders, this arm of the Tajik power structures should be one of the most focused. Yet the lack of a comprehensive border management strategy still hinders the effective utilization of embassy and international assistance. State Department International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL)-funded

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programs including the construction of a Border Forces Academy and border outpost refurbishments continue to be at risk because of the Border Force's lack of transparency and direction. Likewise, the Border Guards initially rejected joint training with Afghan Border Guards at an INL-funded training facility, but have begun to respond to international concern expressed by donors at the Ambassadorial level and during senior meetings connected with the bridge opening. Nonetheless, this issue requires constant intervention as the Border Guards in general, and Mirzo in particular, mistrust Afghans.

Theater Security Cooperation

¶20. (S//NF) U.S.-Tajik Defense Cooperation. Geographically, Tajikistan occupies a strategic location within CENTCOM's area of responsibility. By reason of history, Tajikistan is viscerally concerned with stability in Afghanistan, which directly affects Tajikistan militarily, economically and in terms of population movements. Tajikistan was an early supporter of Operation Enduring Freedom, even offering a base at Kulyob, a fact which the President usually mentions. The most direct route from Manas Air Base to Afghanistan is over Tajikistan (as it was from K2 base in Uzbekistan). Tajikistan has been extremely permissive, granting blanket overflight clearances and divert and refueling options, although the latter two are rarely used. (Note: the French Air Force maintains a detachment of 250 personnel at Dushanbe Airport, which supports ISAF operations with cargo and close air support. The French have recently deployed 3 Mirage fighters from Dushanbe to Kandahar, with the other three to follow by the end of October.)

Tajikistan also has an LNO in CENTCOM's Coalition Village, and offered forces to Afghanistan, which was turned down due to the no-neighbors policy and a suspicion that they were probably offering more than they could support. Although the Tajik President did not respond positively to 2006 Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's probes on basing here, citing his need to get along with all his neighbors, nevertheless, Tajikistan is proud of their contributions to the efforts in the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

¶21. (U//FOUO) CENTCOM Theater Security Cooperation. Tajikistan cooperates with the U.S. military through the CENTCOM annual military-to-military (MTM) contact program. A fairly robust series of information exchanges (14 in 2006, 22 thus far in 2007), numerous Marshall Center events and participation in multilateral exercises and 4 SOCCENT JCETs are all aimed at improving Tajik military capabilities, defense reform and extending governance to the far eastern mountainous regions of Tajikistan. The Ministry of Defense, National Guard, Main Department of Border Forces, and the Committee for Emergency Situations all participate in our military cooperation events. Through the State Partnership Program and annual MTM program, Tajikistan has an excellent relationship with the Virginia National Guard mostly focusing on NCO/Officer technical skills and professional development, with some disaster response events sponsored by the State Department EXBS program. ARCENT and CENTAF also provide expertise for events focusing on search and rescue in the mountains, logistics and other military capabilities. Tajikistan marginally participates in NATO and EUCOM exchanges, but has participated in Marshall Center programs since 1993. Tajikistan has also recently expressed interest in accepting the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative, funded at \$1.5 million. They have agreed to form an interagency commission to formulate their next steps, the chairman of which is the First Deputy Minister of Defense and Chief of the General Staff GEN-LT (U.S. 2 star equivalent) Ramil Nadirov.

¶22. (U//FOUO) CENTCOM also provided \$5 million in counter narcotics funding for the construction or renovation of 3 border crossing stations, projects just getting underway on the Tajik-Afghan border. State INL funding has been used to build/renovate several other border post facilities. CENTCOM counter narcotics funding is also being used in a multi-year program to provide an integrated communications system which will link the Border Forces from the border to their regional and national HQ, and provide interagency communications between the Border Guards, the MOD, and the Drug Control Agency. The embassy appreciates CENTCOM support in the important areas of border security and counter-narcotics, primarily focused on the

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Afghanistan border.

¶23. (U//FOUO) U.S. Security Assistance. Current security assistance programs focus on improving capability of the Tajikistan armed forces in the areas of tactical and strategic communications, emergency response, English language, and in building a future leadership with Western principles. FMF/IMET

funding levels for FY07 are \$250K/\$343K, DoS requested for FY08 \$675/\$565K, and DoD requested for FY 09 \$600K/\$700K.

Proposed Talking Points

¶24. (U//FUOU) During your bilateral meetings with the President and Defense and Security officials, Embassy Dushanbe recommends Commander USCENTCOM emphasize the below-listed talking points. Note that in general, the Tajiks do not absorb subtle messages well, so a direct approach is recommended.

For President Rahmon

--(U//FOUO) We understand that the Tajik side has only recently permitted limited vehicle traffic across the newly-completed bridge. This is a positive first step and while we understand the need for security, we encourage further use of the bridge to its full capacity. The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Service has an assessment team arriving in November to work jointly with Border Guards, Customs, and other interested government bodies on managing the bridge, but we need those organizations to coordinate better amongst themselves. We also need to see more cooperation with the Afghan side of the border -- some in your intelligence/border guard community have been reluctant to engage their counterparts.

--(U//FOUO) We consider security to be not just an issue of military capability; rather we believe that democratic and economic development are essential for long-term stability. This is why DOD sponsors "non-military" training on topics such as fighting corruption. A strong military is composed of a well-educated corps of professionals who are trusted to make decisions appropriate to their authorities and who are guided by a duty to protect the interests of the people they serve.

--(U//FOUO) Regarding economic development, supporting growth of small and medium enterprises and reducing barriers to investment, such as corruption, will render significant long term benefits for Tajikistan. Likewise, the United States values adherence to human rights obligations -- religious expression, media freedom, minority rights, civil society and education -- as much as it values military security.

--(U//FOUO) Support to CENTCOM Operations - We appreciate Tajikistan's continuing support to the United States in the CENTCOM's area of responsibility. The generous SOFA, blanket overflight clearance and emergency divert agreement granted to DoD are a significant gesture of support, save valuable time and resources and significantly support the development of a stable Afghanistan.

--(U//FOUO)) Afghanistan remains a subject of great concern for both our countries. The entire world has an interest in bringing stability to Afghanistan, and we welcome Tajikistan's positive contribution to this effort. We welcome more joint initiatives with Afghanistan and continue to look for ways to integrate Tajikistan and Afghanistan economically. We welcome the positive role Tajikistan can play in building Afghanistan's capacity.

--(U//FOUO) Having already committed significant funding to Drug Control, Border Security and Counter Narcotics efforts, we would like to see additional results including arrests and convictions at all levels. Low-level seizures and confiscations are not an adequate indicator of our true, joint success in these areas.

For the Minister of Defense Khairoloyev

--(U//FOUO) Greater military proficiency and ultimately better regional security cooperation is best achieved through training and exercises. The USG appreciates positive steps to improve cooperation with the armed forces of Tajikistan, but further progress is essential. USCENTCOM builds capabilities. We do

not provide equipment without training, and in fact we are more interested in providing training than equipment. The units that we train must be real, operational units, with defined roles, missions and responsibilities. A well-trained soldier can learn to use any sort of equipment in different operations.

--(U//FOUO) We understand you have created a special commission to explore the formation of peacekeeping unit under the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative. What are your intentions under this program?

For the Chairman of the State Committee for National Security
Abdurahimov

--(U//FOUO) We are pleased with the counter-terrorism training being conducted with SOCCENT and special operations forces of the Border Forces. It is especially positive that many of the graduates of the last training session were promoted to Warrant Officer under extended contracts. We expect each round of training to be progressive in nature and look for most of the students to be repeat trainees as opposed to new recruits who will depart the Border Forces after their terms of service expire. We look forward to working with the Special Forces Battalion and the Separate Group for Special Reconnaissance under their new, lighter Table of Organization and Equipment.

--(U//FOUO) We would like to see more responsiveness, accountability, access and transparency with the Main Department of Border Forces. Having already committed significant funding to communications, border outpost refurbishment and training we would like to see additional results including arrests and convictions at all levels resulting from border violations, especially in the area of Counter Narcotics efforts. Low-level seizures and confiscations are not an adequate indicator of our true, joint success in these areas.

--(U//FOUO) In order to properly secure Tajikistan's borders and maximize the utility of our assistance, it is imperative that the Border Guards coordinate with other Tajik government agencies such as Customs and the Drug Control Agency. It is also important to work more closely with your Afghan counterparts as well.

Proposed Speaking Points for Press Opportunity

¶25. (U) The Tajik media is largely self-censoring and as such will probably not ask difficult or stumping questions. This is an excellent opportunity to relay the below messages on behalf of the Country Team, as well as engage a generally neutral-friendly audience, who gains most of its information from the Russian media.

--(U) The United States considers security to be not just an issue of military capability; rather we believe that democratic and economic development and the respect for human rights are essential for long-term stability. This is why DOD training includes some "non-military" topics such as fighting corruption.

--(U) We consider Central Asians themselves at the center of our approach to this part of the world, and we reject any notions that Central Asia is merely an arena for outside powers to compete for influence. Tajikistan is not the object of America's geopolitical struggles with anyone. We aim to support your goal of an independent nation whose citizens have the opportunity to realize their destiny. This is why we funded and constructed a \$35 million dollar bridge along with associated Border Control and Customs facilities, to facilitate legal traffic and trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

--(U) Tajikistan is an extremely important country to the United States for several reasons:

--Americans take particular interest in helping emerging nations such as Tajikistan achieve their own goals of independence.

--Tajikistan faces significant transnational threats that are important to regional and international stability. Of primary significance to both Tajikistan and the United States is the future of Afghanistan.

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--It is in U.S. interests to join Tajikistan and its regional partners in combating these threats and further supporting Tajikistan's development and strategic options.

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